



SOUTH WESTERN REGION METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

SOUTH WESTERN REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY

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Transportation Committee
Room 2300, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

RE: House Bill #5180 - *An Act Authorizing Bonds of the State to Electrify the Danbury Branch of the Metro North Railroad*
House Bill # 5448 - *An Act Authorizing Bonds of the State for a Bridge and Walkway at the Wilton Train Station*

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Transportation Committee:

The South Western Regional Planning Agency and The South Western Region Metropolitan Planning Organization are pleased to provide testimony on two separate bills related to bonding authorizations for capital improvements along the Danbury Branch.

The South Western Region is served by both the Danbury and New Canaan Branchlines, with both viewed regionally as most important transportation assets in Connecticut. In 2011 and 2012, our region's legislative priorities included Bond Commission action on both Branchlines to achieve reliable bi-directional service that is faster and with more frequent service. We believe this will foster region wide economic development and encourage increased transit usage.

House Bill #5180, An Act Authorizing the Bonds of the State to Electrify the Danbury Branch line is an important step in that process. We ask that you also include a request for additional funding that would put existing infrastructure in a state of good repair and promote normal replacement for both the Danbury and New Canaan Branch. Many of these system upgrades are highlighted in the ongoing Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Danbury Branch, which describes various infrastructure improvements beyond electrification being designed to complement the ongoing centralized train control (CTC) upgrade that is the first step to modernizing the Danbury Branch. Any effort to electrify the existing Danbury Branch must include elements such as track improvements, rail bridge rehabilitation parking upgrades, modifications to at-grade warning systems, and station upgrades.

We also support House Bill # 5448 - An Act Authorizing Bonds of the State for a Bridge and Walkway at the Wilton Train Station. Despite a distance of only a few hundred feet, Wilton Station is separated from Wilton Center by a rail line, the Norwalk River and the Route 33 Bridge, resulting in a severely circuitous route that pedestrians must navigate. This poor connectivity between the station and the village center can be easily corrected with the construction of a pedestrian bridge and walkway over the Norwalk River. This project was detailed in SWRPA's Route 7 Transportation and Land Use Plan (2011) as part of a Wilton Train Station Area Enhancement Plan to provide a significant improvement to pedestrian movement between Wilton Center and Wilton Station.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Gayle M. Weinstein
Robert M. Byrnes
Co-Chairs, SWRPA/MPO Legislative Policy Committee